

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Literature and its role in human life have always coexisted; humans cannot exist without words, nor can words without humans. Through creative writing, humans not only preserve knowledge and culture but also fuel the progression of imagination and enables the exploration of ideas that go beyond the limitations of reality. Literature serves as both a mirror reflecting human experiences and a canvas for envisioning new possibilities, illustrating the profound connection between words and the essence of human existence. This interplay allows humans to interpret emotions, share stories, and cultivate empathy, further intertwining literature with the fabric of life itself. Literature is an embodiment of words based on human tragedies, desires, and emotions that define the complexities of life. Its significance lies not only in its artistic expression but also in its ability to foster connections between individuals by reflecting shared struggles and aspirations. Literature enables people to see through the lenses of others, and even inanimate objects; therefore, it becomes a looking glass into the world as other beings' view. (Ahmed, 2017) Though literature exists in written form, its true essence comes to life through the reader's imagination, allowing them to engage with the text on a deeper level. Whether through intricate narratives or simple prose, literature challenges the mind to interpret, analyze, and appreciate the depth of human emotions and relationships. Ultimately, literature has provided a way to help its readers understand about things they have not experienced themselves.

Convenience Store Woman, originally コンビニ人間 (*Konbini Ningen*) is a 2016 novel by Japanese author Sayaka Murata. This novel won Japan's biggest literary prize, the biannual Akutagawa. This was Murata's 10th novel in Japanese but her shot to global fame as it was her first novel to be translated into English as well as 30 other languages; this novel was superbly translated by Ginny Tapley Takemori and has now sold more than 2 million copies in 40 countries. Murata's

degree at Tokyo's Tamagawa University was in art curation; the course combined art, music, literature and theatre. Murata's incredible imagination is almost inhumane to her acquaintances, but for the case of *Convenience Store Woman*, it came from her origin story as she worked in various convenience stores for 15 years and is also unmarried. Murata's work is to expose the absurdities and hypocrisies of various conventional beliefs and her characters wrestle constantly with the notion of normality, similar to herself. (Measure, 2024)

Convenience Store Woman serves as an exploration of the mundane daily existence of Keiko Furukura, a seemingly unremarkable 36-year-old woman who has spent the entirety of her adult life working in a convenience store. Unlike most of her peers, Keiko does not adhere to societal expectations regarding marriage, career advancement, or social conformity. Instead, her self-acceptance journey unfolds through the seemingly mundane tasks and rigid routine of the convenience store, which provides her with stability and a sense of belonging. Throughout the novel, Keiko's journey is marked by her increasing awareness of how different she is from those around her, and her growing realization that her own path to fulfillment lies outside conventional norms.

Keiko's acceptance is not a psychological or emotional process, but a practical one. She found her purpose not by introspective moments of reflection, but by her actions, interactions, and the structure of her job. Through her work at the convenience store, Keiko learns that she does not need to conform to the societal expectations. Instead, her self-acceptance moment occurs as she embraces her role within the store, discovering that fulfillment can be found in simplicity and routine. The novel challenges the notion that self-worth must be tied to societal success, and instead suggests that personal meaning can be constructed in unconventional spaces. The store becomes her sanctuary, providing her with a purpose and identity she could not find elsewhere.

This research paper will examine Keiko's journey of self-acceptance, focusing on how her experiences in the convenience store shape her identity, allow her to reject societal pressures and ultimately lead to a deeper understanding of herself. By analyzing her inner struggles and the convenience store's role in her

life, this research paper will explore the role routine and the rejection of societal expectations play in Keiko's personal journey.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study above, this research paper will answer the research question of:

1. What are Keiko Furukura's inner struggles?
2. How does the convenience store help Keiko in her journey of self-acceptance?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research paper is:

1. To explore Keiko's inner struggles through her behavior.
2. To discover in what ways does the convenience store plays a role in Keiko Furukura's self-acceptance journey.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research paper will examine Murata's novel *Convenience Store Woman* through the character of Keiko Furukura, this study will explore how her process of self-acceptance is intricately tied to her work in the convenience store. Readers may gain empathy and a deeper understanding of individuals who deviate from societal norms, as well as find parallels between Keiko's journey and their own experiences. Additionally, this research paper seeks to highlight the role of self-acceptance in shaping personal identity, fostering a greater appreciation for the diversity of human experiences. By examining these themes, this research paper aims to provide a deeper insight into how self-acceptance can be attained by unconventional choices.

1.5 Methodology of the Study

The methodology of this research paper is the qualitative method due to this research paper not involving any measurements or statistics. The writer of this research paper believes that this research paper belongs to the qualitative category because it explains things with descriptions instead of mathematical equations. The type of method used is descriptive qualitative. This research paper used Sayaka Murata's novel, titled *Convenience Store Woman* as the object of research. The

primary data source comes from the book itself and the rest of data sources comes from journals, books, and articles on the internet as a source of supporting data for the research in this paper. The data collection and analysis techniques used in this research paper is document analysis due to its source being a novel. This research paper will delve into the definition self-acceptance in the character through her actions as described in the novel.

1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The writer of this research paper will focus solely on the novel of *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata and relevant supporting materials to examine the concept of self-acceptance and what it entails. This analysis will explore how the main character, Keiko Furukura, experiences a self-acceptance journey through her role as a convenience store worker. By centering the research on the novel's depiction of Keiko's transformation and its implications, the writer aims to maintain a thorough and consistent analysis. These limitations are intentionally set to ensure the research paper remains narrowly focused on its primary objective without straying into unrelated topics.

1.7 Status of the Study

Raluca Nicolae in her journal article titled *The Modern Shape-shifter Maiden in Sayaka Murata's Convenience Store Woman* discusses about the main character's journey in life and how she has become a modern shape-shifter who regularly practices the art of imitation and employs different strategies in order to be upgraded from a part-time member to a full-time member of normalcy. Nicolae also stated that the ending is quite prophetic and it parallels to Keiko's situation since in her professional life she has failed to get a full-time job and that she will not make any progress as a full-fledged normal person. (Nicolae, 2018)

Mochamad Chotib, Sherinkeshia Syahnia, and Heditya Widodo in their journal article titled *The Influence of The Store as Spatial Setting Toward the Main Character's Development in Sayaka Murata's Convenience Store Woman* which is a literary criticism which comprises the theory of New Criticism, especially its argument that centers on the analysis of the main character in the story. This research proposes that spatial settings can become one of the most determinant

factors to affect the character's development in the story. The finding proves that the store is influential to the main character's development as it plays as the character's life-anchor to evaluate, measure or even decide how worthy the main character is as a human. Before the convenience store, Keiko had an obscure personality with a logical and dichotomous mindset, resulting in her isolation from society. This article also highlights the difference in Keiko's personality before and during working in the convenience store. (Chotib, Syahnia, & Widodo, 2023)

Gracia Chambers in her journal article titled *Aesthetic Engagement and Soundscape: A Case of Convenience Store Woman, a Contemporary Japanese Novel* wherein she discusses the novel through the theory of social aesthetics. The paper argues that the convenience store's environment such as the social interactions, and soundscape presented in the novel, this article also discusses regarding the main character's auditory sensibilities, and how society would ignorantly and unkindly judge people working in a convenience store for too long as it is at the expense of making certain societal, progressive moves, yet Keiko sees working at a convenience store as being both quantitatively and qualitatively sufficient; it provides not only a means of earning her living but also making a life. (Chambers, 2023)

Despite using the same corpus, the writer of this research paper will not use the same theory and thus will not achieve the same results as the studies mentioned above. The writer will use the self-acceptance aspects to analyze the novel *Convenience Store Woman*.

1.8 Organization of the Study

The use of this subchapter is to help the readers understand more explicitly about this research paper. The details are as follows:

1. Chapter I – Introduction

This chapter provides background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of study, research methodology, scope and limitations of the study, status of the study and organization of the study.

2. Chapter II – Review of Related Literature

The chapter will consist of the writer of this research paper's findings regarding the paper's theme and will provide the reader with previous research papers with the same theme to see the implication of the theory in different works of literature.

3. Chapter III – Findings and Discussion

The research findings will be discussed and statement of the problem of the research paper will be answered in this chapter.

4. Chapter IV – Conclusion and Suggestions

This chapter will be of the conclusion of the research and will provide suggestion to the readers that will continue the research theme.

